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TEXAS MAN PLEADS GUILTY **IN INTERNATIONAL CHILD EXPLOITATION ENTERPRISE CASE**

WASHINGTON and PENSACOLA, Fla. – Erik Raymond Wayerski, 46, of Leander, Texas, pleaded guilty today to charges related to his involvement in a vast global child pornography trafficking enterprise, Acting Assistant Attorney General Matthew Friedrich of the Criminal Division, Acting U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Florida Thomas F. Kirwin and FBI Executive Assistant Director J. Stephen Tidwell announced.

Wayerski was one of 14 alleged members of the enterprise who were charged in a 40-count superseding indictment on March 19, 2008. Wayerski has pleaded guilty to six counts relating to his criminal activities as a member of the group, including: engaging in a child exploitation enterprise; conspiracy to advertise, transport, ship, receive and possess child pornography; advertising child pornography; transporting child pornography; receiving child pornography; and obstruction of justice. The charges were brought under the Child Exploitation Enterprise statute, passed in July 2006 as part of the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act.

According to plea documents, Wayerski admitted to participating in a highly-sophisticated and well-organized criminal enterprise whose purpose was to proliferate child sex abuse images to its membership during a two year period. According to Wayerski's guilty plea, members of the illegal organization utilized Internet newsgroups – large file-sharing networks where text, software, pictures and videos can be traded and shared – to traffic in illegal images and videos depicting prepubescent children, including toddlers, engaged in various sexual and sadistic acts. As alleged in the indictment, group members utilized sophisticated encryption methods to avoid detection and traded more than 400,000 images and videos of child sexual abuse before being dismantled by law enforcement. The charges were developed after law enforcement infiltrated the group in August 2006.

Wayerski faces a minimum prison sentence of 20 years and a maximum of life in prison, in addition to statutory fines. He will be sentenced following the trial of the remaining defendants in 2009.

In addition to Wayerski, three other members of the enterprise have pleaded guilty in this case to date. Ruble Keys, 55, of Medford, Ore., pleaded guilty on March 19, 2008, to four charges related to his role in the enterprise. Warren Weber, 56, of Boise, Idaho, pleaded guilty to five related charges on April 17, 2008, and Stepan Bondarenko, 38, of Philadelphia pleaded guilty to four related crimes on April 28, 2008. Trial for the remaining defendants is scheduled

to begin Jan. 5, 2009, in Pensacola, Fla., before Senior U.S. District Judge Lacey A. Collier. The remaining defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty in a court of law.

The case was brought as part of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative designed to protect children from online exploitation and abuse. Led by the U.S. Attorneys' Offices, Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state and local resources to better locate, apprehend and prosecute individuals who exploit children via the Internet, as well as identify and rescue victims. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit <http://www.projectsafchildhood.gov/>.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney David Goldberg of the Northern District of Florida and Trial Attorney LisaMarie Freitas of the Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section. The case is being investigated by the FBI and the Queensland, Australia, Police Service, with the assistance of the Bundeskriminalamt (BKA) Child Pornography Unit in Germany, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre in the United Kingdom and the Toronto Police Department in Canada.

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